



House Select Committee on Homeland Security **Democrats**

JIM TURNER, Ranking Member

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AIRPORTS STILL UNSAFE

***TSA LACKS OVERALL PICTURE OF AIRPORT SECURITY
GAO REPORT FINDS MULTIPLE LAPSES***

WASHINGTON - Although "thousands of airport workers falsified immigration, Social Security, or criminal history information to gain unescorted access" to secure areas of airports, the Transportation Security Administration still does not require them to be physically screened before they enter secure areas, according to a General Accounting Office report released Tuesday by Senate Governmental Affairs Committee Ranking Member Joe Lieberman, D-Conn., and House Select Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Jim Turner, D-Tex.

The report - which focuses on TSA's responsibility to protect secure airport areas, back entrances and exits, and take measures to ensure airport workers have been thoroughly screened - demonstrates that air travel is not as safe as it could be or should be, two and a half years after terrorists boarded four planes and used them as missiles to murder 3,000 innocent Americans.

"Since September 11, the TSA has done much to screen passengers and their baggage but has neglected other less visible areas of an airport's operation," said Lieberman, who requested the GAO investigation in April 2003. "The bottom line is that airports remain too vulnerable to terrorist attack, and yet TSA has no overall picture of perimeter, entry/exit, or worker security at the nation's 440 commercial airports."

"The GAO's report is a wake up call that our skies are not as safe as they need to be from the threat of terrorism," said Turner, who joined on the GAO request. "As Democrats have said repeatedly, we have a long way to go to close the security gaps at airports. The Safe PLANES Act, introduced by Democrats last month, takes the necessary steps to eliminate the potential risk posed by unchecked airport workers."

The GAO investigation found that TSA has only begun to meet its obligations to protect secure areas, access control to secure areas, and worker screening, as required by the Aviation and Transportation Security Act of 2001 (ATSA), or has not met them at all.

For example, the GAO report said that:

* TSA is not requiring, as the law demands, that airport workers with unescorted access privileges to secure areas be physically screened before they enter these areas. TSA says onetime employee fingerprinting is sufficient and physical

screening would be expensive and difficult. But a federal investigation found that 4,200 workers falsified documents to gain access to secure areas, yet some of these workers were cleared through a fingerprint check. Another investigation found employees smuggling drugs aboard planes.

* TSA found threats to the perimeters and secure areas at every airport it examined, but has not yet determined how it will use the information to improve airport security nationwide. TSA suspended further airport assessments in January 2004 to focus resources on assessing threats from shoulder-fired missiles and has no date for resuming the assessments.

* TSA has not yet assessed, recommended, much less deployed technology - such as biometrics - for preventing unauthorized access to secure areas at the nation's largest airports, even though breaches of security have increased in recent years.

GAO said it is "understandable" that TSA has not met all the requirements of the law because of the enormity of the task. Nevertheless, it concludes some of TSA's efforts have been "fragmented rather than cohesive." As a result, GAO said, TSA does not have a plan for how it will address its security oversight responsibilities and will be less able to justify its resource needs and demonstrate progress."

"I would guess this GAO report will send a shiver down the spines of Secretary Ridge and TSA Acting Administrator Stone, who must assert their leadership to raise airport security to the minimum level Congress requested by law more than two years ago," Lieberman said. "I pledge my cooperation with them to secure the resources necessary to do what the law requires to protect the American people from the possibility that airplanes might be used again as a means of assault."

Democrats on the House Homeland Security Committee also committed their support by announcing their intention to introduce amendments to the Appropriations bill that would close the security gaps highlighted in the GAO report.

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